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INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L TIRANA 001067

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SCE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/21/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NATO](#) [AL](#)
SUBJECT: ALBANIA: SOCIALIST PARTY CHAIRMAN: THE SP
SUPPORTS NATO REFORM EFFORTS

Classified By: Ambassador John L. Withers II, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) In a one-on-one conversation with the Ambassador following EUR/DAS DiCarlo's December 19 DVC with Albanian leaders on Kosovo, Tirana mayor and Socialist Party (SP) chairman Edi Rama voiced consternation that the USG might be misconstruing the party's position in supporting Albania's future NATO membership. He had, he said, asked former Foreign Minister and SP parliamentarian Arta Dade to explain the SP's position on judicial and electoral reform to various diplomatic missions, including the American Embassy. Rama professed concern that Dade's presentation might be taken as refusal to participate in passing reform packages essential to a potential NATO invitation. (Note: Dade in fact had called on the Ambassador the previous day to deliver exactly such a message; the Ambassador cautioned her against being seen in the international community as obstructing Albania's NATO hopes and strongly advised the SP's leadership to reconsider its position. End note.)

¶2. (C) Nothing, Rama insisted, could be further from the truth. Past Socialist Party governments had been the strongest advocates of Albania's membership in the Alliance and the party under his leadership remained steadfast in its determination to achieve that objective. To that end, he and other members of the SP were engaged in discussions with the Berisha government to move judicial and electoral reform forward as expeditiously as possible. The governing Democratic Party (DP) and the SP, he maintained, had wide areas of agreement on restructuring the organization of Parliament. The key issues of the civil registry and the national identification card were in government hands and no longer matters of parliamentary debate. It was "not easy," Rama declared, for the SP to work with the government on reforming the judiciary, given what he claimed were PM Berisha's "illegal" machinations in removing former Prosecutor General Theodor Sollaku. Nevertheless, Rama promised concerted and good faith efforts to reach agreement with the majority on this crucial issue.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador welcomed Rama's determination to reach common political ground with the government in the larger national interest. It is essential, he told Rama, that leaders across the political spectrum set aside political infighting and reach compromises if the NATO goal is to be achieved. The Ambassador stressed a good outcome in Bucharest, should it occur, would not be seen as the success of any single party or even solely of the government, but of the nation, the opposition included, united for the national good. He promised to provide Rama an Embassy-prepared fact sheet on key elements of judicial reform (copy e-mailed separately to EUR/SCE).

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Rama's comments mark a major turnaround in the Socialist Party's position. As recently as a few days

ago, the SP leadership was talking tough and threatening confrontation with the majority parties on reform proposals. Two principal factors seem to be at play in the reversal. First, Rama has come under pressure from the SP rank-and-file. A consortium of SP mayors from some of the country's larger cities has urged cooperation with Berisha, whom they credit with major increases in allocations for municipalities in the government's recent budget. Moreover, Rama is acutely conscious that, with an issue as important as NATO on the line, the Nano wing of the party, still chafing under Rama's rather eccentric leadership style, may once again be enticed to desert to the Berisha camp, as happened during the presidential elections this past July. (The Nano faction has presented a list of demands to Rama and said they will consider leaving the party early in 2008 if those demands -- concerning internal party structure and decision-making -- are not met.) Finally, Rama is desperate to avoid condemnation in the international community, and especially in Washington, as the man who undermined Albania's NATO hopes, should an invitation not be forthcoming in Bucharest. Alternately, he would hope to merit some degree of credit if a NATO invitation should come. Still, Rama's new attitude is welcome news. We will monitor him and PM Berisha closely to ensure that they meet their stated intentions. END COMMENT.

WITHERS